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ABSTRACT

Fort Hays State Univesity offers a hybrid basic communication course. Competent speakers need to master public speaking skills (including suitable interpersonal skills), demonstrate nonverbal behaviors which support the verbal message, and be able to listen with literal and critical comprehension. However, increasing numbers of schools teach only performance-oriented public speaking skills. The course at Fort Hays State University teaches the communication process, listening, perception, how language affects meaning, nonverbal communication, self-disclosure, managing conflict, and developing and maintaining relationships. During the Spring 1995 semester, 314 students completed a pre-assessment test, and 266 students completed the post-assessment test. Results indicated a statistically significant increase in scores. Specific objectives of the course include: to define communication; understand how the communication process works; identify factors that affect perception; describe how language helps people understand, predict, and control the world around them; and define communication competence and discuss its role in conversations. In addition to paper and pencil tests, assessment measures are being developed for student portfolios, which should satisfy concerns of accountability and certify that students have attained mastery of specific interpersonal communication skills. (Contains 12 references.) (RS)

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Assessing Student Learning Outcomes in Teaching Interpersonal Communication

The Importance of Interpersonal Communication

According to Rubin and Mead (1984) in school, proficiency in speaking and listening skills is a prerequisite to academic success. In our daily lives, such proficiency is a prerequisite for being socially and psychologically well adjusted and developing functional interpersonal relationships. In the workplace, workers who are competent communicators are highly sought after and valued. Finally, proficient communicators are needed to maintain our democratic form of government and to be effective participants in a global society.

America 2000: An Education Strategy--Goal 5: "Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship" (Bush, 1991, p. 3). Building on this the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS, 1993) identified the following as the important interpersonal skills: a) working on teams, b) teaching others, c) serving customers, d) leading, e) negotiating, and f) working with people of diverse cultural backgrounds.

According to, Speaking and Listening Competencies for Sophomores in College (SCA), the competent speaker needs to master public speaking skills which include suitable interpersonal skills, demonstrates nonverbal behaviors which support the verbal message, and be able to listen with literal and critical comprehension. However, a longitudinal study of the content of the basic communication course (Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, Smythe, & Hayes, 1980; Gibson, Hanna, & Huddleston, 1985) which began in 1968 has found increasing numbers of schools which teach only public speaking skills and that those courses were performance oriented. Of those requisite skills which SCA identified only listening is taught in most basic communication courses and this is often the only communication course most college students take. The time allotted for preparation and presentation of speeches in the basic course is at the expense of such skill areas as interpersonal and small group communication. A survey of 23 universities in 13 states (Brice, 1993) found that 65% of the basic courses were public speaking courses. Given the discrepancy in the requisite skills identified by SCA and those taught in the basic course, some change in course content seems indicated.

FHSU Basic Communication Course

Fort Hays State University offers a hybrid basic course. In the interpersonal section we teach: the communication process, listening, perception, how language effects meaning, nonverbal communication, self-disclosure, managing conflict, developing and maintaining relationships. Small group communication was previously included in course content but recently omitted because of time constraints. With that exception FHSU appears to teach all requisite interpersonal skills previously identified. Last year an assessment test was developed and pilot tested.

During the Spring 1995 semester, 314 students completed the pre-assessment test, 297 students completed the Unit 1 Test (covering: the communication process, perception, listening, and language) and 277 students completed the Unit 2 Test (covering: nonverbal, self-disclosure, relationships, and small group), and 266 students completed the post assessment test.
Test items were multiple choice questions. We are still refining the test. There was a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-test scores.

Percentage of Students Answering Test Items Correctly

Topic	Pre-test	Unit Test	Post-test
Communication process			
Item 1	62.42	79.8	72.56
Item 2	91.08	94.28	92.48
Item 3	38.2	77	47.7
Perception			
Item 1	66.56	84.85	71.05
Item 2	65.92	87.54	72.93
Item 3	80.57	88.89	90.23
Listening			
Item 1	63.37	95.29	80.08
Item 2	80.6	95	91
Language			
Item 1	23.56	92.93	78.95
Item 2	63.05	75.08	66.54
Item 3	24.2	70.71	48.87

IPC Assessment

Nonverbal			
Item 1	25.15	51.99	43.23
Item 2	50	42.6	60.9
Item 3	17.83	62.09	43.61
Self disclosure			
Item 1	46.5	56.7	47.4
Item 2	37.3	86.3	72.9
Item 3	67.8	76.5	64.7
Item 4	7.3	54.9	25.2
Conflict	56.1	84.1	74.4
Relationships	55.4	86.3	78.6
Small group			
Item 1	50.63	83	74.5
Item 2	67.2	92.1	85
Item 3	38.9	56.3	38.7
Total mean score	48.8*	84.14/69.4	65.6* *(p=.001)

Hay (1992) reported that universities most commonly used course evaluations to assess the requirements and programs of study in communication. Among the concerns she raised was the lack of involvement of communication department faculty in assessing outcomes in communication, more often these were assessed by an administrative committee when assessing general education outcomes. The data collected had minimal impact for faculty or students. Emphasizing the link between assessment and learning through faculty involvement of planning and implementing assessment activities results in more successful assessment programs (Backlund, Hay, Harper, Williams, 1990). Additionally, only one- third of the departments had defined goals and/or objectives (Hay, 1992). This makes goal attainment assessment difficult and assessment less successful as it is not tied to expectations.

We began by examining the goals of our General Education Program and determining which where appropriate for the basic communication course. For the interpersonal segment of the course the following was applicable:

Objective 3: Developing the student's understanding of the listening process and through the application of effective critical listening skills through in-class experiences. Also, each student develops the effective oral presentation skills needed for interpersonal interaction.

IPC Assessment

Course goals (Crawford, Hashem, Krug, Strohkirch, & Watt, 1995) applicable to the interpersonal segment are:

1. To increase knowledge of, appreciation for, and skill in effective interpersonal communication for relational development and maintenance.
2. To increase awareness and skill in being an effective listener in private and public settings.
3. To enhance an awareness of, and appreciation for, the role of communication in a democratic society.
4. To promote the use of open, honest, and ethical communication at home, work, and play.

Specific Objectives:

1. To define communication.
2. To understand how the communication process works.
3. To point out personal and situational factors that influence communication in interpersonal and public contexts.
4. To understand that perception is a process involving the interpretation of sensory experience.
5. To identify factors that affect perception, especially beliefs, motives and attitudes.
6. To develop sensitivity to the ways that communication shapes perceptions of others and self.
7. To describe several steps that listeners can take to improve message reception and retention.
8. To identify the different types of listening and their purposes.
9. To describe how language helps us understand, predict and control the world around us.
10. To describe several functions of verbal communication and understand the dynamic nature of language.
11. To define nonverbal communication and describe how it differs from verbal communication.
12. To explain why skill in nonverbal communication is essential.
13. To investigate interpersonal communication from both a contextual and developmental perspective.
14. To describe how a "relational" context affects meaning in communication.
15. To define communication competence and discuss its role in conversations.
16. To describe the stages in relationship formation and termination.

In addition to a paper and pencil test we are developing assessment measures for students portfolios. Although Rueben, Welch and Buerkel (1995) found satisfactory results using the

Communication Competency Assessment Instrument-High School Edition (CCAI-HS) when testing high school students it tests primarily public speaking skills. A colleague, Dr. Hashem, is developing a checklist for a nonverbal observation activity which students in an advanced interpersonal course will use when eating at local restaurants. In addition to developing assessment tools, training for instructors using performance-based assessment needs to be conducted (Khattri, Kane, & Reeve, 1995). Barton and Collins (1993) note that portfolio assessment should involve activities similar to "real life" roles students will play and experiences they will have. I think it would be helpful to involve students at the level of selecting activities for assessment. We should survey them to determine what they feel are the most common and/or most important interpersonal skills they will be using. From this survey and course goals and objectives, the departmental faculty will select one or two activities to be used for assessment purposes and develop evaluation criteria for assessment. After developing the activities all faculty teaching the basic course will be trained in evaluating student performance on the(se) activity(s).

The use of a paper and pencil test and performance based assessment should satisfy concerns of accountability and certifying that students have attained mastery of specific interpersonal communication skills and supply some information for program evaluation. Exclusive use of performance-based assessment has caused concern that too little attention is being given to teaching skills. Using a combination of types of assessment will hopefully address a vareity of concerns. Skill assessment in the basic course would involve more basic or lower levels of mastery than assessment done in the advanced interpersonal course. This then also addresses sequencing of content concerns. However, this has not addressed the diagnostic aspects of assessment, where to place students in a sequence of instruction. Data from several semesters would provide some indication of whether or not we have set appropriate levels of mastery and chosen appropriate skills to concentrate on in the basic course. Future development of the basic course interpersonal segment should reflect these discoveries.

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